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A N U T T T H E H O L Y G R A I L



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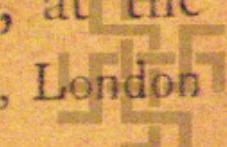
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No. 14. * The Legends of
the Holy Grail. By Alfred
Nutt.

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1902



Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

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Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay
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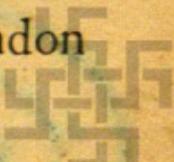
The Legends of The Holy Grail

By

Alfred Nutt

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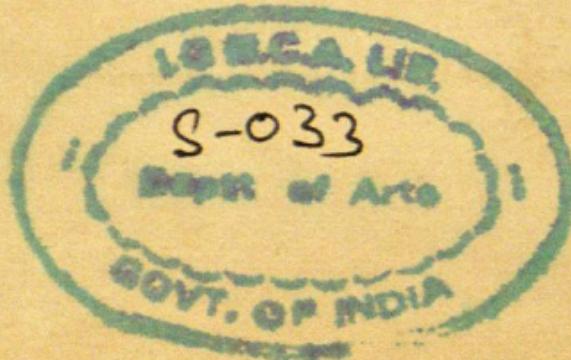
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PREFACE

THE present study follows the lines of my previous work upon the subject: "Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail, with special reference to the hypothesis of its Celtic Origin, 1888," in so far as I first lay before the reader the *facts* in the shape of brief summaries of the romances, and then endeavour to interpret these facts in the most natural and unforced manner. Limits of space have compelled me to cite only the salient, absolutely essential facts, to disregard many secondary points of which I dwelt fully in my 1888 work, and to discard absolutely all polemic against other investigators of the Grail literature. I may say briefly that the conclusions to which I came in 1888 have, in the main, been strengthened by the subsequent course of research, especially by the work of Miss Weston, to whom are due the most pregnant and illuminating suggestions in the field of Arthurian study during the last ten years, and whom I must thank for reading the proofs of the following pages and for many valuable remarks.

In the Bibliographical Appendix I have only cited such books and articles as have appeared since 1888, with which the serious student of the cycle needs to make himself acquainted. For Grail literature prior to 1888 I refer, in so far as it is not cited in the Appendix, to my previous work.

ALFRED NUTT.



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THE HOLY GRAIL

In Number 1 of these studies I sketched the historical and social conditions which determined the great outburst of romantic literature in the twelfth century. In Number 4 Miss Weston enumerated the chief themes and incidents, the combination of which makes up the Arthurian cycle, the most prominent and characteristic example of the mediaeval romantic spirit. One section of the Arthurian cycle, that which comprises a number of stories describing the search for, and the history of, a mysterious object known as the Grail, or the Holy Grail, she left on one side. Although now inextricably bound up with the Arthur legend as a whole, the connection is secondary. In part, at least, the Grail stories were originally independent of the Arthurian cycle, and they present a series of problems differing, in a marked degree, from those involved in the consideration of the other Arthurian romances, and necessitating separate investigation.

Such unnecessary mystery has accumulated around the Grail stories, and they have become

the happy hunting ground of mystical enthusiasts. There are good reasons why this should be so. In the first place, whatever be the interpretation placed upon a certain sequence of incidents which recurs repeatedly and in varying forms in these stories, it undoubtedly described from the first a search for wonder-working talismans, the possession of which constituted, in a measure, a *summum bonum*; in the second, this fact was apparent to several mediæval writers who have left us their version of the Grail quest, expressed in the terms of mediæval Christian mysticism; thirdly, and this is perhaps the chief reason, several of the Grail stories, and notably one of the oldest and most important, have come down to us in an unfinished or fragmentary form. We cannot be sure how this or that writer conceived the story as a whole, or in what sense he figured the Grail to himself.

Thus we have the primary and essential element of mystery inherent in every story which sets forth a quest for that which transcends the ordinary conditions of human life; we have the secondary, but also essential, element of mediæval mystical interpretation; finally, we have the purely accidental element of fragmentary and enigmatic presentation. It is not surprising if, under these circumstances, so much nonsense has been written about the Grail.

The chief cause which has led many able, learned,

and ingenious men to spin idle theories deserves a moment's consideration. In the immense and confused mass of the Grail romances some particular fact or set of facts has been picked out, isolated from its setting, and interpreted without reference to the romances as a whole. The only way to avoid this error is to survey, however briefly, all the essential facts, and to arrange them in the order of their development. To understand how these stories came to assume their present shape is to be near understanding what they originally meant.

The Grail romances, of which I propose to enumerate, succinctly but sufficiently, the leading themes, incidents, and sequences of incident, may be divided into two main classes. In the first, the chief stress is laid upon the adventures connected with the quest for certain talismans, of which the Grail is only one, and upon the personality of the hero who achieves the quest ; in the second, upon the nature and history of these talismans. The first may be styled the Quest, the second the Early History versions ; but these designations must not be taken as implying that either class is solely concerned with one aspect of the legend.

FIRST CLASS : QUEST VERSIONS.

Chief among these is the vast poetic compilation known as the *Conte del Graal*. This mass of

over 60,000 verses came into existence between 1180 and 1235, or 1240, but we can only date with any accuracy the section which extends from v. 1283 to v. 10,601, and is the work of the most celebrated French poet of the twelfth century, Crestien de Troies, who began to write about 1150, has left a number of romances, mostly belonging to the Arthur cycle, and who died about 1181. He himself states that he took the story from a book given him by a Count Philip of Flanders, who died, Crusading, in 1191, after having been Regent of France in 1180-81.

Conte del Graal: Crestien.—Perceval is brought up by his mother in the forest to which she has retired. Purposely kept in ignorance of all that relates to chivalry and warfare, he one day meets and questions a band of passing knights. Neither the warnings nor the entreaties of his mother avail to prevent his following them to Arthur's court. Thence, after adventures which foreshadow his future eminence in knighthood, he rides forth in search of further adventures. He is welcomed and trained in all manner of knightly exercises by Gonemans, who, amid other recommendations, bids him avoid over-readiness in speaking and asking questions. Leaving Gonemans, he succours an oppressed damsel, Blanche-fleur (Gonemans' niece), with whom he stays

awhile. Again he roves forth, chances upon two fishermen, and is directed for a night's lodging to a castle hard by. Entering, he is led into a great hall wherein is a couch and upon it an old man. A squire enters bearing a sword upon which is written that it will never break save in sore peril. The host gives it to Perceval, "to whom it was adjudged and destined." Another squire enters bearing a lance from which blood drips. Perceval would have asked concerning this wonder, but minds him of the counsel not to speak or inquire too much. Two more squires enter, each with a two-branched candlestick, and a damsel, in her hand a "graal"; this shines and puts out the light of the candles as the sun does that of the stars. A second damsel follows holding a silver plate. At supper the "graal" is again brought, but Perceval does not venture to ask wherefor it is used. On the morrow, awakening, he finds the castle deserted, his horse saddled, and the drawbridge down. He rides forth, and the drawbridge closes so suddenly as well-nigh to crush horse and rider. In the forest he meets a damsel lamenting over a dead knight. She tells him his last night's host was the fisherman who had directed him to the castle; wounded by a spear thrust through both thighs his only solace was in fishing, whence he was called the Fisher King. She asks if Perceval

had seen the bleeding lance, the "grail," t
silver dish—had he asked their meaning? Ne^{en}
then what was his name? Perceval le Gallois^{te}
Nay, rather Perceval the Caitiff, for had I^m
asked concerning what he saw, the good kirst
would have been made whole again. She y,
Perceval's cousin. After many adventures Per-
ceval returns to Arthur's court. The following
day a damsel, more hideous than could be pictured
outside hell, appears, and curses Perceval for
omitting to ask concerning lance and grail; had
he done so the king would have been healed of
his wound and ruled his land in peace; now
maidens will be put to shame, orphans and
widows made, many knights slain. She further
tells of adventures to be achieved at the Castle
Orgellous, and of Montesclaire where a damsel
is held captive. Gauvain (Sir Gawain) will
forth to the imprisoned damsel, Giflès to the
Castle Orgellous, Perceval to learn concerning
Grail and lance. Nothing is said of Giflès'
adventures, but those of Gauvain are related at
great length. Of Perceval we learn that after
wandering five years without thinking of God,
he meets on Good Friday a band of penitents, is
rebuked for riding armed on such a day, and is
bidden to confess to a hermit hard by, who turns
out to be his uncle: Perceval has sinned in
leaving his mother and thereby causing her

death, and for this reason could not ask concerning lance and grail. The story returns to Gauvain, in the midst of whose adventures it breaks off.

Crestien tells us, then, of a precious object, the "graal," preserved in company with other talismans, a bleeding lance, a broken sword, in a mysterious castle ; of a hero who visits this castle ; who should have asked concerning its wonders ; refrains from so doing, and thereby draws down upon his head bitter reproaches and long wanderings. Had he finished his poem he would, doubtless, have told us exactly what the "graal" was, why it and the lance were precious, and the nature of the relation between the hero and the wounded fisher king. As it is, we must turn for this information elsewhere, and we cannot be sure that what we find corresponds to Crestien's plan.

Conte del Graal: the Continuators of Crestien.—Several continuations exist which, from the vague indications yielded by their authors, may be dated between 1190 and 1240. It is noteworthy that Gauvain's adventures fill nearly as much space as do those of Perceval himself ; he, too, is brought to a castle, in which a dead knight lies on a bier ; lance and sword and Grail appear ; Gauvain asks concerning these objects, but falls asleep in the midst of

his host's recital. On the morrow he walks on the sea strand, finds the country-side heretofore desert, bursting into blossom, and is at once blessed and banned by the country-folk, blessed for having partly delivered the land from its curse, banned for not having wholly succeeded. This adventure occurs in the first continuation, due to a certain GAUTIER, who relates many adventures of Perceval, which seem to have no connection with Grail and land. Thus he has an *amour* with a Water-fay, inmate of a castle in which is a magic chess-board which plays by itself against the hero ('tis a work of *Morghe la Fée*); she sends him in pursuit of a stag which he slays, but is deprived of the fruit of his success by a "maid of ill chance." He comes again to the Fisher King, asks the necessary questions, and is then given a broken sword to weld together, a task to be accomplished by none save a lover of God and of His spouse, Holy Church. He succeeds... for one little crack, is embraced by the Fisher King, and hailed lord of his house. In another continuation, that of MANESSIER, Perceval achieves the adventure of the castle by slaying Partinaus of the Red Tower, nephew of Espinogre, who had treacherously slain Goon Desert, the Fisher King's brother, in revenge for his uncle's death. The sword with which the foul blow was struck

broke, and the pieces might only be rejoined by the destined avenger; in handling them the Fisher King was wounded. On seeing Partinaus' head the king leaps to his feet, is straightway made whole, hails Perceval as his nephew, and is succeeded by the latter at his death. In yet another continuation, that of GERBERT, stress is laid upon Perceval's forsaking Blanchefleur, whom, after avenging her uncle Gornumant upon a hideous witch, he rejoins and marries (being assured in a dream that of his seed shall be the Swan Knight and the Deliverer of the Holy Sepulchre), comes again to the Fisher King's castle and pieces together the sword.

In addition to these varying statements concerning Perceval's achievement of the task laid upon him by the hideous damsel, the continuations to Crestien (some 50,000 lines in all) yield several accounts concerning the nature, origin, and history of the Grail and lance. Before discussing these we must first examine a German, a Welsh, and an English romance, the contents of which are closely allied to Crestien's poem, and, in part, to the continuations.

The Parzival of Wolfram von Eschenbach. —This is a metrical romance, written certainly not later than 1215, as Wolfram died about 1220, and wrote his *William of Orange* after the *Parzival*.

Wolfram claims to follow a French poem by a certain Kiot (*i.e.*, Guiot). Crestien's poem is mentioned, but disparagingly :

The hero's father, Gahmuret, son of Gandin of Anjou, goes to the East, wins the love of a heathen queen, Belakane, whom, after a while, he leaves to go back to his own country, and who in his absence bears a son, Feirefiz. Gahmuret meanwhile has married Herzeloide; returning to the East he is slain in battle. [Here begins the portion of the poem which agrees with that of Crestien, the chief differences being as follows]: The more important position assigned to Parzival's cousin; the far greater prominence of the Grail, described as a stone yielding all manner of food and drink; its power sustained by a dove which every Good Friday lays a Host upon it; given after the fall of the rebel angels to Titurel and his dynasty; preserved by them in the Grail castle, Monsalvatch, and guarded by a sacred order of knights, the Templeisen, whom it chooses itself. These knights are vowed to virginity, their king alone being allowed marriage, and his incurable wound is due to his having taken up arms in the cause of worldly and unlawful love. The question Parzival should have put to him is, "What aileth thee, uncle?"

When he leaves the castle after the first visit he is mocked at by the inmates for having omitted the question. More stress is laid upon the broken sword, connected with which is a magic spell, to be mastered before Parzival can become master of the Grail castle. In the interview with the hermit uncle Parzival is strongly urged to return to his wife Condwiramur [Crestien's *Blanchefleur*]. Gauvain's adventures are far more closely connected with the story of the chief hero than is the case in Crestien, though this may be due to the latter's poem breaking off in their midst. In the concluding portion of the work, to which nothing corresponds in Crestien, Parzival fights, unknowing, against his half-brother, Feirefiz, the fight being stopped by mutual recognition. The hideous damsel reappears, and bids Parzival to the Grail castle, where he is rejoined by wife and two sons; Feirefiz is baptized, weds the damsel who has care of the Grail, returns to the East, and is the father of Prester John. Parzival rules over the Grail kingdom, and his son, Loherangrain, is Knight of the Swan.

In comparing Wolfram with Crestien several points are worthy close attention. The Crusading tone of the introductory history of the hero's father is noticeable in connection with the fact that the

order of Grail knights is obviously intended to suggest the great Crusading Order of the Knights Templar. As the whole of this part of the work is connected with a genealogical legend of the Angevin princes (our English Plantagenets), and betrays Southern French affinities in the personal and place-names, which differ greatly from those in Crestien, it is impossible that it can be the invention of the German poet, who must, in these particulars at least, be following a French source, which, again, must have been very different from Crestien. Once admit the existence of this French source and it seems simpler to refer to it the very important difference between the presentation of the Grail in the two works rather than to attribute it to Wolfram. With Crestien the Grail is distinctly a vessel, with Wolfram a stone ; the former insists little, the latter much, upon its food giving properties. In Crestien, the Fisher King's wound has no moral justification ; in Wolfram, it is the punishment of the king's sin in breaking his vow. In Crestien, the question relates to the nature of the talisman and the use to which it is put ; in Wolfram, primarily to the sufferer from the effects of sin, secondarily to the hero who can only attain full perfection by sympathetic compassion with the suffering caused by sin. This deepened and intensified spiritual interpretation of the incident cannot be disassociated from the Crusading framework and the

modelling of the Grail knighthood upon that of the Temple.

Peredur, the son of Evrawc.—This is a Welsh romance, known to us from MSS. of the thirteenth century :

The earlier portion corresponds closely in sequence and general character of the incidents with Crestien's poem. But there is marked difference in the scene at the Fisher King's castle. What Peredur sees is first, a lance dripping blood, then a salver in which is a man's head swimming in blood; nothing answers to the Grail. After this adventure the Welsh tale, whilst agreeing generally with Crestien, has special features. Thus Peredur defends a castle against the Sorceresses of Gloucester, one of whom hails him as their destined overcomer, yet from whom he learns chivalry and the use of arms. There is also a large section (nearly one third of the tale) to which nothing answers either in Crestien or in any extant French work. In the latter part of the tale, after the appearance of the hideous damsel, the Welsh, whilst offering to a large extent the same sequence of incidents as in Crestien and Gautier, relates them in a far more coherent and intelligible manner. For the tale closes with the appearance of a youth who reveals himself as Peredur's

cousin—he it was had borne the bloody head in the salver; he, in the guise of the hideous damsel, had incited Peredur to continue the quest; he had intervened in the chess-board and stag-hunt adventures to aid and incite Peredur, his object being that Peredur should avenge upon the Sorceresses of Gloucester the death of the cousin whose head was carried in the salver, and the laming of the uncle.

The Welsh tale is thus in a large measure a logical and straightforward version of a hero's vengeance upon supernatural beings for the injuries inflicted by them upon his kindred. As is frequently the case, these supernatural beings know that they must ultimately succumb, and are indeed constrained to furnish means for their own undoing; as is again frequently the case, the hero is passive, almost a dummy, the real protagonist being one of the injured kinsmen. Had we the story in a purer form we should find that the injury, so far as he is concerned, consists in the enchantment of hideous and unsexing disguise, an enchantment from which the consummation of the vengeance can alone free him. The object of the talismans is here to remind the hero of the wrong done and to supply the avenging weapon. *Peredur*, it will be seen, is like Manessier in being a vengeance story pure and simple, and like the Gawain visit to the Grail castle

in Gautier, in so far as the head on the salver in the one case answers to the knight on the bier in the other.

Sir Percyvelle.—An English metrical romance found in the Thornton MS., written shortly before the middle of the fifteenth century; to judge by the language the romance in its extant form cannot be much older than the date of transcription.

The opening incidents are similar to those in Crestien and the Welsh *Peredur*, but with this difference: in all three the hero's first adventure after reaching Arthur's court is to slay a knight who had offered grievous insult either to Arthur or to his queen; in Crestien and in the Welsh tale little stress is laid upon this incident, but in the English romance it supplies the backbone of the story (in Wolfram, too, the incident is more emphasised than in Crestien). This knight, known as the Red Knight, had slain Percyvelle's father and been foredoomed to perish at the hands of the avenging son; moreover, he has a witch mother who, later, encounters the hero and is slain by him, and he has persecuted with his enmity Percyvelle's uncle and cousins. The remainder of the story is taken up by an incident corresponding to Perceval's deliverance of Blanchefleur in Crestien, and to Percyvelle's rejoining

his mother, who, thinking he was dead, had lost her senses. He ultimately goes to the Holy Land and there dies.

The English romance contains nothing corresponding to the visits to the first uncle (Gonemans) or to the Fisher King, and makes no mention of the Grail or of any other talisman. It is a simple and straightforward version of a widely-spread tale of a son's vengeance upon his father's slayers. But for the final touch of the hero's going to the Holy Land there is no suggestion of religious colouring.

Before discussing the statements made by the continuations of Crestien respecting the origin and nature of the Grail and other talismans beheld by the hero at the Fisher King's castle, it is advisable to sum up the evidence on this point already laid before the reader. One French version (Crestien) speaks of a sword, a bleeding lance, and a Grail (a vessel); another (if Wolfram's poem be regarded as representing a lost French original) of sword and lance and Grail (a stone); the Welsh tale mentions a bleeding lance and a head in a salver; the English romance is silent concerning any talisman. In three versions (*Conte del Graal*, Wolfram, and *Peredur*), the talismans are in some way connected with a hero's restoration to health of a kinsman. From Crestien we can only surmise

how or why this happens, but learn from one of his continuators (Manessier) that it is an effect of successful vengeance ; this is also the case in *Peredur*, whilst in *Sir Percyvelle* there is also an injury avenged. In Wolfram, on the other hand, the idea of vengeance is absent ; the injured kinsman, suffering from the effects of his own sin, is relieved when the hero rises to such a height of spiritual insight as enables him to understand and sympathise with the sin-caused suffering. In the Welsh story alone, is the machinery by which the vengeance is effected (talismans and transformed kinsman), used in a reasonable and intelligible way. We further note that the scene of all these versions is laid in Britain, and that the personages are almost exclusively British, the exceptions being found in Wolfram, where they are mostly Angevin or Breton.

We may now turn to the accounts concerning the nature and origin of the Grail and other talismans to be found in the *Conte del Graal*. There are several, differing in detail, but agreeing substantially, that the Grail is the dish (of the Last Supper) in which Joseph of Arimathea caught the blood of the Saviour as He hung upon the Cross, and the lance the one wherewith Christ's body was pierced. Joseph was cast into prison, miraculously delivered, and, exiled in company with the sister of Nicodemus (Veronica), who had

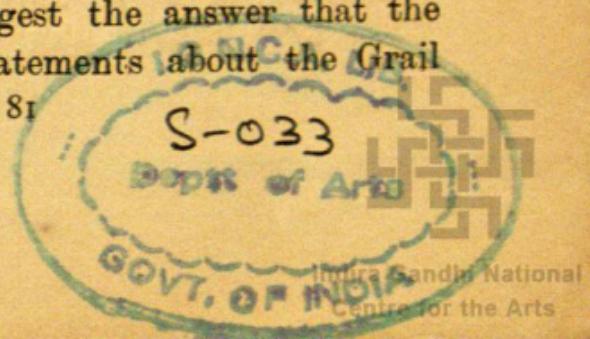
an image of the Lord, passed into Britain, the promised land, with a large following. When short of food Joseph prayed for the Grail in which had been gathered the holy blood ; it was sent, and the company had bread and wine and meat in plenty. After Joseph's death the Grail passed into the keeping of his kin, from whom both Perceval's father and the Fisher King were descended. In another account Joseph is sustained whilst in captivity by the Grail ; when released he has adventures with a heathen king, Evelach, and his brother-in-law, Seraphe, whom he converts and re-names Mordrains and Nasciens. Yet another account duplicates Joseph's captivity after his arrival in England, and the Fisher King is duplicated by Evelach-Mordrains, wounded for presumption in approaching too near the Grail, and miraculously kept alive to be healed by the best of all knights of Joseph's kin.

These various accounts are found in what are plainly the latest portions of the vast compilation known as the *Conte del Graal*, and in several cases their disagreement with the context stamps them as interpolations.

In asking ourselves if these statements faithfully represent that description of the Grail and allied talismans, which we must assume to have been in Crestien's source and which he would have reproduced had he finished his poem, we cannot

fail to note the grave and essential discrepancies between the different portions of the legend taken as a whole. Why, if the Grail talismans are of such surpassing sanctity, is the use to which they are put so apparently profane? Did Christ send forth Holy Vessel and lance to Britain merely that Perceval might heal his kinsman and succeed him in his kingship, or Gauvain restore a waste land to fertility, or that the dwellers in the Grail Castle might feed on the fat of the land? Again, is it not significant that the very portion of the *Conte del Graal* (Manessier's), which dwells most lengthily upon the sacred Christian nature of the talismans, is also that which pictures Perceval's conduct in as distinctly non-Christian a light as in the *Peredur* or *Sir Percyvelle*? And how, if the whole story started from the sacred nature of the talismans, hallowed by their association with the Passion, came the Welsh and English romances to discard these sacred associations, to omit the most sacred of the precious objects, and to substitute a story of blood feud and vengeance unmarked by any trace of spiritual, let alone specifically Christian, feeling? Finally, why does the one version, Wolfram's, which is animated by deep and lofty spiritual feeling, not represent the Grail as the receptacle of Christ's blood?

These questions suggest the answer that the Christian legendary statements about the Grail



talismans are really secondary, and intended to explain the importance attached to them in the story of their quest. But before accepting this answer as correct we must note that Christian symbolism of some sort is involved in *all* the quest stories. Thus alike in Crestien, Wolfram, and the *Peredur* is found the Good Friday incident : the hero having wandered long and far and lost count of days and seasons, is met on Good Friday by a knight who rebukes him for riding armed on such a day, and bids him to confession and absolution. In Wolfram, too, the machinery by which the miraculous virtue of the Grail is sustained is distinctively Christian and connected with Good Friday.

Two elements thus seem to be present, a definitely Christian and a possibly non-Christian one, and although the Christian element in one form appears late and secondary, yet in some shape or other it is present in the very oldest versions of the story as a whole.

One thing we could safely postulate, namely, that the distinctively Christian element traceable in the *Conte del Graal* must exist somewhere else in a more coherent and rational form. In effect, two versions of such a form exist: a prose romance, known as the *Grand St. Graal*, of unknown authorship, and a metrical trilogy, due to a certain Robert de Borron, of which only the first two portions, *Joseph of Arimathea* and *Merlin*, are extant.

SECOND CLASS OF VERSIONS : EARLY HISTORY OF THE GRAIL.

Robert de Borron : Joseph of Arimathea, Merlin.—Borron's poem is dedicated to a Walter, Count of Montbéliard, a famous Crusader, who became Regent of Cyprus and Constable of Jerusalem; he died in 1212, and is not likely to have been in a position to act as patron before 1170, so that these dates may be taken as limits for the writing of Borron's romances.

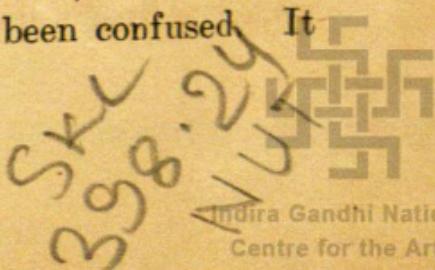
Christ's Passion is described, and how Joseph, having obtained the Lord's body, washes it and collects the blood in a vessel. In their anger the Jews cast him into a prison, where he is visited by Christ, who gives him the precious vessel containing His holiest blood and confides secret words to him: Joseph is to yield the vessel to three persons only, who are to take it in the name of the Trinity; he is further instructed concerning the Sacrament and how he is to celebrate it. Years pass and Joseph remains in prison until released by Vespasian. He then converts many, among them his sister Enygeus and her husband Brons (or Hebron). Sorrow falls upon the Christian community through indulgence in carnal sin. Joseph kneels before the vessel, weeps, and asks wherefor his people suffer. He is bidden prepare a table in memory

of the one whereat Christ ate the Last Supper. At that table an empty seat is to be left, which may not be filled until a son is born to Brons and Enygeus ; a sinner who attempts to occupy it is swallowed by the earth ; a divine voice then tells Joseph that not ^{nor} Brons' son but his grandson shall fill the seat. Brons is to catch a fish and place it on the table by the vessel ; by this means the sinners are detected, and the vessel is called "Graal," as being agreeable to those who behold it. In time Brons and Enygeus have twelve sons ; Joseph, praying before the vessel, announces that eleven will marry and one, Alain, remain single. But almost immediately Joseph is bidden tell Alain all about the vessel, and how from him there shall issue an heir who is to keep it ; Alain is to lead his brethren westwards. This he does. Another of the company, Petrus, is also commanded by the voice to go to the Vale of Avaron. Joseph is further told that Brons is to keep the vessel after his (Joseph's) death, and is bidden instruct him in the Holy Words God spake in the prison. Brons is to be known as the Rich Fisher, from the fish he caught ; he is to wait for his son's son and to give him the vessel when the meaning of the Blessed Trinity shall be known. After seeing Brons put in possession of Grail and headship Petrus departs, followed after three days by Brons,

Joseph remaining in the land in which he was born.

The *Merlin* follows immediately, in substantial agreement with the other Merlin romances up to Arthur's withdrawal of the sword from the anvil, where the author stops, with the remark that he can no longer speak of Arthur until he has told of Alain, son of Brons, what manner of man he was, of his kin, and of how the woes of Britain were caused.

It should be noted that Borron's poem, in the Joseph portion at least, is obviously abridged, and, possibly, altered in parts by a maladroit editor. What gives colour to this surmise is that, in addition to the original metrical form, there exist several prose versions, in which occur a number of interpolations designed to bring the text into conformity with later developments of the legend. Some such process may already have begun before the poem was turned into prose, and to it may be due discrepancies such as that Alain, vowed to celibacy in one line is married almost in the next, or that now Brons' son, now his grandson, is to achieve the venture of the empty seat, and, presumably, to be the Grail-keeper, or that, apparently, two different accounts of the Grail's arrival in Britain, in the one case in Alain's, in the other in Brons' guardianship, have been confused. It



is, however, possible that these discrepancies are due to Borron himself, and are the result of an unskilful contamination of two forms of the legend.

In spite of these discrepancies, it is noteworthy that, with the exception of Wolfram's *Parzival*, Borron's poem is the only work of the cycle which is not only animated by a Christian symbolic conception (as are several other romances), but which carries out that conception in an intelligible manner by means of the incidents of the story. This conception may be briefly summarised as follows: Sin, the cause of want among the people; separation of pure and impure by means of the fish (symbol of Christ); punishment of the self-willed false disciple; reward of Brons by charge of the Grail; symbolising of the Trinity by the three tables and the three Grail-keepers.

In view of the skill with which the conception is worked out, it seems more reasonable to attribute the above noted discrepancies to the existence of an earlier form of the legend in which there were only two Grail-keepers, father and son, or uncle and nephew, traces of which have persisted in Borron's version.

The Grand St. Graal.—The romance thus entitled is one of the longest and latest of the cycle. Allusion to an episode contained in it, and

it alone, is made in the chronicle of a certain Helinandus, assigned to a date prior to the year 1204, and this has been held by some scholars to enable the dating of the romance. But the argument is doubtful, firstly, on account of the extremely composite nature of the Grand St. Graal in its present form, and, secondly, because the dating of the passage in Helinandus' Chronicle is by no means sure.

The romance opens with a prologue in which the authorship is boldly ascribed to Christ Himself. It then tells of Joseph of Arimathea, who, believing in Christ and desiring to possess somewhat belonging to Him, carries off the dish of the Last Supper, and, having begged Christ's body from Pilate, uses the dish to collect the blood flowing therefrom before he places it in the sepulchre. He is imprisoned, but comforted by Christ and fed from the holy dish. Delivered by Vespasian, baptized by St. Philip, he converts seventy-five of his kin and friends, and, at the Lord's command, makes an ark for the dish. The company, miraculously fed thereby in its journey through the wilderness, reaches Sarras. Here Joseph and his son, Josephes, aid and convert Evelach. Josephes is instructed by Christ how to perform the Sacrament, and is made sovereign shepherd over the new sheep. When the

dish is first shown to Evelach's brother-in-law (who receives the name Nasciens at baptism) he says it pleases him (*li grée*) entirely, hence it is called *Gréal*. Josephes, wounded by a lance, and Nasciens blinded for approaching too near the Grail, are both healed by an angel, the lance head being preserved: it shall drop blood at the beginning of the Wonders of the Holy Grail and the Lance, and but one man should behold those marvels of the Grail, and but one other be struck by the lance, and he should be the last of Josephes' kin, and his healer, the achiever of the Grail wonders, should be the last of Nasciens' kin. Divers adventures of Evelach (baptized Mordrains) and Nasciens follow, and visions to Nasciens concerning his descendants ("all these wonders are true, as Christ Himself wrote the book of the Holy Grail, and, save it, naught else but the Lord's Prayer and the judgment on the woman taken in adultery"). Nasciens finds Solomon's sword and is wounded by it. The story returns to Josephes, who leads a choice company to Great Britain. Here they find Nasciens' son, Celidoine. Joseph and Josephes are imprisoned by King Crudel of North Wales but delivered by Mordrains, to whom our Lord appears in the likeness of one crucified, bidding him go to Britain. Mordrains retires to a hermitage, building a monastery for white monks.

and stays there until Perceval and Galahad see him, as is told in the tale of the Holy Grail. We then hear of Brons, who up to now has not been mentioned ; he brings his twelve sons to Josephes, eleven are married, and the twelfth having chosen virginity is appointed guardian of the Grail at Josephes' death. Alain's fishing is described, and how, having caught a fish which suffices to feed all the company, he is called the Rich Fisher, a title borne after him by all the Grail keepers. We are also told of Petrus, who converts and marries a heathen princess, and from whom descends Lot of Orcanie, father of Gauvain. Also of Galahad, Joseph's son, whom the men of Hocelice take as their king, and who is ancestor to Ywain, son of Urien. Joseph and Josephes die and the latter confides the Grail to Alain. A lordly castle hight Corbenic ("Holy Vessel in Chaldee"), is built for it. For sleeping in such a holy place a king is wounded through both thighs. At Alain's death his brother Josue becomes Grail keeper, and after him six kings, the last of them Pelles, on whose daughter Lancelot of the Lake begets Galahad, Lancelot being, himself, eighth in descent from Celidoine, son of Nasciens.

There exist three romances which are concerned with the Quest of the Grail, but, nevertheless,

less, must be reckoned among the two Early History versions just summarised, with which they are closely connected. One of the three, known as the *Quête del St. Graal*, was for long the most famous work of the cycle, and is still the one best known to Englishmen, as it was embodied, almost entire, by Malory in the *Morte Darthur*. Malory's work being generally accessible, the story need only be given briefly.

Quête del St. Graal.—It tells of Lancelot's son, Galahad, coming to Arthur's court, of his achieving the adventure of the Siege Perillous and the sword in the block; of the appearance of the Holy Grail, which fills each beholder with meat such as he longs for; of Gauvain's vow to go in quest of it for a year and a day, which the other knights of the Round Table join in. The adventures which befall Galahad and the other questers are for the most part such as are foretold in the *Grand St. Graal*, and mostly exemplify the sin of carnal love and the ascetic virtue of Galahad. One, however, assigned to Lancelot, is not mentioned in that romance: Lancelot finds a wounded knight seeking solace from the Holy Vessel, the Grail appears, but Lancelot says never a word, for which aftertimes much mischance was his; when he awakes he is bitterly reproached.

Perceval finds Mordrains kept alive, having fed on naught but the Lord's body for 400 years, and waiting the arrival of the good knight. Lancelot comes to Castle Corbenic, but is struck insensible and powerless for many days for approaching too near the Holy Vessel. Galahad, Perceval, and Bors ultimately come to Castle Corbenic, where they are joined by nine (or ten) other knights; Josephes appears and celebrates the Sacrament for the whole company. Christ makes Himself visible to Galahad and bids him to Sarras whither the Grail is to depart, Britain being unworthy of it; but first he is to heal the maimed king. The three then go on Solomon's ship, are thrown into prison and there fed by the Holy Grail; a final revelation is followed by the death of Galahad, followed after a year by that of Perceval, who is buried in the same grave. Bors returns to Britain and tells the adventures of the Holy Grail, which are written down and kept in the Abbey of Salisbury, whence Walter Map drew them to make his book for the love of King Henry.

The second romance is almost the least known work of the cycle. It derives the name under which it is commonly known (*the Didot Perceval*), from the fact that the solitary MS. in which it is

found belonged to the well-known collector, A. F. Didot. This MS. also contains prose versions of Borron's two poems, *Joseph of Arimathaea* and *Merlin*, and it is natural, at first blush to take the *Didot Perceval* for a prose rendering of the otherwise lost conclusion of Borron's trilogy. But this, as we shall see, is certainly not the case.

Didot Perceval.—The story opens with Merlin's account of how he made the Round Table, our Lord having made the first, Joseph the second, he (Merlin) the thir^e. He also tells of the Rich Fisher King who is old and full of infirmities, and may not be healed until a good knight comes to ask of what use is the Grail. The story turns then to Perceval, son of Alein le Gros, whom, when dying, the Holy Ghost directs to send his son to Arthur's court. He achieves, though with difficulty, the venture of the Perillous Seat, learns about Rich Fisher and Grail, and vows to quest for them. Many knights make the same vow. Perceval then has a number of adventures similar to those in Gautier's section of the *Conte del Graal*, notably those at the Chess-board castle and the Stag Hunt. He then comes to the Fisher King's castle, sees lance and silver plate and a vessel in which was our Lord's blood. He had fain asked, but fears to displease the king, minding him of

the injunction laid upon him not to be over curious, for a man of idle words is displeasing to the Lord. In the morning all the inmates of the castle have disappeared, and on riding forth he is reviled. After further adventures the Good Friday incident occurs ("the songmen in their pleasing rhymes say nothing of this," asserts the writer!). Merlin then appears, urges Perceval to go again to his grandfather; he does so, asks the question, the king is cured, and the enchantments of Britain cease. Perceval is instructed concerning lance (the one wherewith Longis pierced Christ's side) and Grail (the vessel in which Joseph caught Christ's blood as it flowed to the ground), so called because it is agreeable to worthy men. The Holy Ghost bids Brons teach the secret words our Lord on the Cross told Joseph; he does so, but the writer cannot, and may not, say what they were. Brons is carried off by angels and Perceval remains.

Comparison of this romance with Borron's undoubted work shows that they cannot be by the same man. Borron's capacity for working out a spiritual conception has already been noted. It is certain that he did not intend to represent either Brons or Alain as subject to a mysterious curse, from which son or grandson was to free them. He did, on the other hand, intend the visit of the

"third man" to exemplify certain spiritual dogmas, and that this should be worked out through certain personages and certain incidents which are specified. Now the *Didot Perceval* lays almost as much stress as the *Conte del Graal* upon the mysterious malady of the Fisher King, but it does not exemplify the spiritual dogmas insisted upon by Borron, and it neglects or misunderstands the incidents to which he intended to pay special attention. It is, in fact, an incongruous jumble of hints from Borron's work, and a confused version of the *Conte del Graal*. Its intention, which is undoubted, to be a sequel to Borron's poems, makes it almost certain that he never completed his trilogy.

Perceval le Gallois.—The third romance will be known to many English readers, thanks to Dr. Sebastian Evans' exquisite English version, styled the *High History of the Holy Grail*. It is also known as the *Perlesvaus*, but it will be convenient to designate it by the title given it by its first editor, M. Ch. Potvin, *Perceval le Gallois*. It is in prose, and was written for a certain John, Lord of Nesle in Flanders, who was living in the year 1225.

Of all the Quest romances this is the most confused and aimless. It professes to be written by Josephus at the bidding of an angel. It tells of the good knight descended by his mother

from Joseph d'Abarimacie, who kept the lance wherewith Christ was pierced, and the Holiest Vessel in which His blood was gathered. On his father's side the good knight was descended from Nicodemus ; his mother's brother was the Fisher King, King Pelles, and the King of Castle Deadly. In his youth he came to the Court of the Rich Fisher, but omitted to ask whom one served with the Holiest Grail, whence wars ensued and the King fell into sickness. Afterwards both Gawain and Lancelot came to the Grail Castle. Gawain first to the Castle of Enquiry, where the sword is preserved wherewith John the Baptist was beheaded. Gawain is silent in the Grail Castle, where he beholds Grail and lance. Lancelot may not see the Grail on account of his sinful love to Guinevere. The Fisher King dies, and his land is seized by his brother, King of Castle Deadly, who is a heathen ; Perceval's struggle against him, his victory and winning of the Grail Castle are told at great length. He is visited by Arthur, Lancelot, and Gawain. Arthur beholds the five mysterious transformations of the Grail, 'about which may no man speak, for the secrets of the sacrament shall no man disclose save God give him power thereto.' The story does not end here, but tells of many other adventures of Perceval, who finally sails away on a ship with white sail on which is figured a red

lion, 'never has man learnt what became of him.' This story, written in Latin (from which it was translated into French), was found in the island Avallon, in a holy house of God on the shores of the Moor adventurous, where Arthur and Guinevere are buried.

A special feature of this romance is the insistence upon Perceval's virginity. It is as marked a feature in his case as is that of Galahad in the *Quête*.

The difference in tone and sentiment between these romances and those of the first class is so marked as to make the reader feel he has been transported to another world. The chivalric is here subordinated to the Christian ascetic element. True, the hero's prowess is insisted upon in set conventional terms, but the centre of interest is shifted from his personality and from the feats and ventures by which it is manifested to, the symbolic machinery of the precious vessel and its accompaniments. Contrast the two romances in which the spiritual element avowedly dominates: Wolfram's *Parzival* and the *Quête del St. Graal*. In the former the personality of the hero is the main thing; we follow the ripening, strengthening, ennobling development of a genuine man, one who suffers and sins, but who also loves and endures, is staunch and true, and who, purified by the dis-

cipline of suffering, attains at last the summit of usefulness and happiness. This man is a knight, a man of the world, as it was conceived of by the author's generation, sharing in the feelings and sentiments common to his class; his knightly struggles and ventures have an interest for their narrator independent of any symbolic significance. In the *Quête*, on the other hand, the hero, a shadowy perfection at the outset, remains throughout a shadowy perfection, a bloodless and unreal creature, as fit when he first appears upon the scene as when he quits it to accomplish a quest, purposeless inasmuch as it only removes him from a world in which he has neither part nor share. The driving power of the romance is supplied by its fierce insistence upon the supreme excellence of celibacy and by the fervour of its sacramental symbolism. All else is indifferent or hateful to the author.

These differences in tone and feeling, not to be fully appreciated save by those who read the original text, would alone suffice to negative the hypothesis that the two sets of romances are the dissevered halves of a homogeneous whole, or variant versions of a common original theme. The distinction between them is far more deeply seated.

The second class of Grail romances gives, it has been seen, a Quest of the Holy Vessel differing markedly in part from that in the first class.

Now in two versions (*Didot Perceval* and *P. le Gallois*) belonging to this class the hero is Perceval, as in the first class, and in the *Quête*, Perceval is only second to the main hero. Again, one, the *Didot Perceval*, reproduces many of the adventures of the *Conte del Graal*, whilst the *Quête* also has the central adventures at the Fisher King's castle, though greatly altered and attached to a secondary personage, Lancelot. The inference is unmistakable; the Quest portions of the second class of Grail romances are in part based upon and derived from a Quest story similar to that found in the *Conte del Graal* and allied versions. To understand the real significance of the Quest incidents we must address ourselves firstly and chiefly to the romances of the first class. How does it stand with the other portion of the legend, the Early History of the Grail? The later portions of the *Conte del Graal* contain, we saw, fragments of an Early History substantially the same as that found in *Grand St. Graal* and *Quête*. Wolfram's *Parzival*, on the other hand, contains an Early History which is absolutely and entirely different. Remembering that those portions of the *Conte del Graal* which do yield this Early History are demonstrably the latest in date of that vast compilation, noting that they bear the traces of being obvious and at times inconsistent interpolations, the further inference is, if not certain, at least highly probable, that the Early History of

the *Conte del Graal* is based upon and derived from one akin to that found in the *Grand St. Graal and the Quête*. In other words, each section of the legend has borrowed from the other features and incidents inconsistent with its real essence. The fact that Crestien's continuators had to turn for information to works animated by such a different spirit justifies the surmise that they found nothing of a similar nature in his source, and that, as in the intervening lapse of time a special Christian account of the Grail had become the popular one, they felt constrained to clumsily substitute this dominant version for that of Crestien's source.

If what may be called the Joseph of Arimathea Early History be considered closely, it will be seen that in both its two main forms it is essentially a legend of the Conversion of Britain. Both forms start with Joseph, but at a later stage go widely asunder. In Borron it is kinsmen of Joseph, Brons, or Alain, or Petrus, who are the leaders of the evangelising emigration, it is to them that the Holy Vessel is confided. In the *Grand St. Graal-Quête* version Joseph's son, Josephes, is the leading spirit, and the fortunes of the Grail are bound up with those of Joseph's direct descendants or with the converted heathens Mordrains and Nasciens and their kin. This second is the popular version, the one which affected the later stages of the *Conte del Graal*. The fact that what may be called the

Vulgate Early History (whether in its Brons or Josephes form) is in reality a Conversion of Britain legend, is important when we recollect that the personages of the *Conte del Graal* and allied versions (the oldest form of the Quest) are British, and that the scene of the story is Britain, as also that the Wolfram Early History is asserted to be derived from a chronicle of the Angevin princes, the lords of Britain throughout the formative period of the Grail cycle. The romances of this cycle belong, by their origin, their purport, and their content, to England and not to France, a fact obscured for us by their being written almost entirely in French, and to a large extent by French writers, and only intelligible when we recall that throughout the twelfth century French was almost as much the language of what is now England as of what is now France, and that throughout a large part of the century the *Matière de Bretagne* was the fashionable and influential romance for all that was cultured in Western Christendom. It also, I think, puts out of court all attempts to derive this great body of romance from the numerous Holy Vessels found on the Continent since the First Crusade, and of which the *Sacro Catino* of Genoa was the most famous. The legends connected with them have none of them any connection with Britain.

But if the Early History of the Grail be thus a conversion of Britain legend, whence does it

derive its personages and incidents? The answer to this question decisively confirms the contention that the Grail romances are of insular and not of Continental origin. The account of Joseph, of his relation to Christ, his captivity, &c., is derived, in addition to the Gospel narrative, from a group of apocryphal writings, of which the *Evangelium Nicodemi* is the central and dominant one. Now it has been shown that, owing to circumstances of which we know nothing, this group of apocrypha was familiar to, and influential with, English writers in the eighth to eleventh centuries, at a time when no trace of it can be found in the other literatures of Western Christendom. Of course, these apocryphal writings are entirely silent about Joseph's conversion of Britain. But we do find an elaborate twelfth century account of the evangelisation of Britain by Joseph in a series of documents connected with, and undoubtedly originating from, the famous West British abbey of Glastonbury. Ignored as it is by Geoffrey of Monmouth, that insatiable romance-monger, the legend can hardly be older than the second third of the century. Whether it is as old; whether, in particular it is mentioned in the genuine writings of Geoffrey's contemporary, William of Malmesbury; whether it be not a reflection of the Grail romances, these are questions still debated by scholars. As the details are different from

anything in the romances, as in its earlier and simpler form there is no mention of the Holy Vessel, it is hard to see how the Glastonbury legend can be regarded as an outcome of the Grail romances. The balance of probability strongly inclines to the view that divers and independent legends of Joseph's conversion of Britain originated in twelfth century England, and that their origin and popularity was in some way connected with the early and wide spread in England of the apocryphal texts which had Joseph as their hero.

Glastonbury was not only a centre of ecclesiastical legend *ad majorem gloriam Britanniae*, but also of the long and persistent efforts of the Angevin lord of England to utilise the Arthur legend for his own purpose in winning over his Celtic feudatories. Here in 1191 was found the tomb of Arthur and Guinevere, a discovery intended to give the *coup de grâce* to the hopes of Arthur's return and victorious championship of a Cymric revolt. Glastonbury also became associated in the twelfth century with Avalon, the old Celtic over-sea paradise; in what manner and at how early a date this association originated are still matters of dispute. It has been suggested that it arose precisely through the Grail romances; but when it is recollect ed how casual is the allusion in Borron's poem to the vales of Avalon, the goal of the Grail company's wanderings, the suggestion

lacks all probability. There is yet another remote and indirect connection between Glastonbury and the traditional account of the Grail legend. A persistent tradition, reaching back to the early thirteenth century, has ascribed the authorship of many of the Arthurian prose romances to Walter Map, the trusted counsellor of Henry II., the Angevin Lord of England whose efforts to utilise the Arthurian romances for his own objects have been mentioned. This traditional ascription is especially definite as regards the Lancelot cycle, in which the secondary versions of the Quest, those which make Galahad, son of Lancelot, its hero, must be reckoned. The final words of the *Quête del St. Graal*, asserting that "Walter Map made the book for the love of his lord, King Henry, who had the story translated from Latin into French," have already been quoted. All these facts, at least, hint at determined attempts made during the second half of the twelfth century to claim for the Church in Britain an origin well-nigh as illustrious as that of any Church, and for the land of Britain a special sanctity as the abiding place of the holiest of Christian relics; these attempts are inextricably bound up with the Arthur legend, and are in part traditionally associated with the trusted adviser of a king who, as we know, sought to utilise that legend for his own ends. They originate directly, or are associated indirectly, with a famous

sanctuary of British Christianity, one which has also other associations, seemingly of a more archaic, non-Christian character.

To realise the fact that both divisions of the Grail legend have their source in twelfth century England raises afresh the question whether they are really parts of one harmonious whole, parts equal in age and import? Assume for one moment that they are, and let us endeavour to realise what was the intention of the legend-writer, and in what way he proposed to carry out that intention. He sought, it is evident, to glorify his own country, a land blessed, above all others, by the presence of Christ's faithful disciples and of the sacred relics of the Passion. The holiness of these relics, the *raison d'être* of the whole legend, must, we would expect, be insisted upon from the first. What, then, could be his object in devising an account of what happened to the relics after they had safely reached Britain? To explain why they were no longer found there? To describe how the Grail-keepers fell from their high estate, and were ultimately restored thereto? Such an object would be intelligible, nay more, would be the only one which, so far as we can see, could have occurred to a writer who planned the whole legend with deliberate foresight. Can it be pretended that it is carried out in the Quest portion of the legend? True, the *Quête del St. Graal* does assert the

unworthiness of Britain to be the home of the Grail, but casually and without any attempt at explanation. True, the *Parzival* does give an explanation, the only one in the entire cycle which appeals to us as in any sense adequate, of the Grail-keeper's suffering. But would one legend-writer have set in motion Christ and Joseph and another have brought down the Grail from Heaven merely to point the moral of Anfortas' unlawful love? And if we could believe that such was his purpose, how are we to account for the fact that every other version (even the most ascetic in spirit) has utterly departed from it? Must we not rather recognise that the suffering of the Grail-keeper, so far from being an inherent element of a Conversion of Britain legend is rather in tacit disaccord with the essential spirit of such a legend and its purpose of exalting Britain as the land favoured by the Holy Vessel and its guardians?

Assume, on the other hand, that the Quest, as we have it in its oldest forms—the story of a hero seeking, by means of certain talismans, to restore a kinsman to health and prosperity, or to avenge an injury done him—became inextricably attached to a Christian legend with which originally it had nothing to do. Does not such an assumption provide a more plausible explanation of all the facts? Would not the attempt to interpret in a specifically Christian sense objects and incidents which in

themselves have nothing Christian, inevitably be carried in a half-hearted and inconsistent way at the best? Would not the nature and intensity of the Christian transformation process vary according to the nature and zeal of the individual writer? Would not such portions as lent themselves less readily to the sanctity of association with Christ be treated with little ceremony, and reshaped at the narrator's fancy? Could we expect any strong regard for the original incidents from writers to whom they were only of value after they had received a Christian gloss, or much feeling for the pertinency of that gloss, provided its Christian character were sufficiently decided? Arguments of this kind cannot be dismissed as of an *a priori* nature; they are based on the ordinary working of the human mind. Every form of imaginative narrative, however fantastic, however detached from reality, has its own logic, to which it inevitably conforms so long as it develops naturally. It is because there is logical disaccord between the various sections of the Grail legends, as we have them, that we are justified in asserting they can never have formed parts of one harmonious whole. The logical inconsistency is even more flagrant if, turning from the legend as a whole, the nature and attributes of the Holy Vessel itself be considered. In the later stages of the cycle it is, as we have seen, an object of the utmost sanctity: by its origin,

its properties, its effect upon its devotees, it appertains to what is holiest in Christianity, and yet it retains to the very end attributes which are purely material, and which could not have belonged to it, had it been from the outset the Sacramental Vessel and nothing else. Even the most definitely and fervently spiritual of the romances, the *Parzival* and the *Quête*, dwell strongly upon its food-producing qualities.

Before proceeding to examine the older versions of the Quest on the assumption of its original non-Christian character, certain aspects of the specific Christian portion of the developed legend claim attention. As we saw, this has its sources in apocryphal far more than in canonical Scripture; as we have assumed, it is superimposed upon a non-Christian basis. Little wonder, then, if we note a disconcerting, unorthodox aspect to be found nowhere else, to my knowledge, in the vast mass of mediæval legend of a distinctively Christian character. After making every allowance, however, for these two factors they fail, I hold, to account fully for the effect produced, an effect only to be realised by reading the romances as a whole. Apocryphal legend is often puerile, often tainted by a questionable mysticism derived from Gnostic sources; the adaptation by unskilful hands of non-Christian incidents to a Christian scheme of interpretation must needs yield occasional results of an

unorthodox character. But the sense in which the Grail romances are unorthodox, or rather anti-orthodox, is far more deep-seated and thorough. They not only claim for the Church of Britain an origin more illustrious than any to which it had pretended before the twelfth century, one which, if seriously maintained; would have been most unwelcome to the chief ecclesiastical authority of Christendom, they also set up a kind of uncanonical church with sacraments, unexceptionable it may be from the purely dogmatic standpoint, but open otherwise to the most serious objections. What may be called the Grail Church has in either form of the Early History an origin only less sacred than that of the official Church of Christendom—nay, in the Sacramental Vessel form (*Borron, Grand St. Graal-Quête*) it excels that Church as possessing the most sacred relics of the faith. The author of the *Grand St. Graal* is fully conscious of this when he tacitly claims his romance, the work of Christ Himself, as superior to Gospel.

In endeavouring to account for the remarkable claims put forward for the Grail Church and its Scriptures two points may be noted. In the *Parzival* form of the Early History the Grail Church is certainly reminiscent of, and modelled upon, the organisation of the Knights Templar. In the *Grand St. Graal* the two most prominent personages, after Josephes, are the converted heathen

warriors Mordrains and Nasciens. Mordrains fills to some extent in the *Quête* the same rôle as Anfortas in the *Parzival*; Nasciens is the direct ancestor of the successful Grail quester. Now both are, without doubt, the outcome of crusading conditions, of the early stage of that great conflict between West and East, between Christendom and the Moslem world, which called the Knights Templar into existence. We know what, at a later date, was the attitude of the Church to the Temple, and how the latter fell, crushed by the terrible accusations of impiety and alliance with the Powers of Darkness brought against it. Is it too rash a conjecture that the Grail romances reveal, in part, early attempts to claim for the knightly priesthood a position and sanction equal, if not superior, to those of the regular priesthood? If only a conjecture, it is at least better founded than the endeavours of earlier scholars to ascribe the essential heterodoxy of the Grail romances to the separatist tendencies of the British Church. May we not further recall the fact that the greatest of the Angevin kings, the politician who so persistently endeavoured to utilise the Arthurian legend for his own purposes, the patron of Walter Map, the traditional inspirer of the Lancelot Grail romances, was the opponent of Becket, and waged the bitterest struggle of his strenuous life against what, to use modern terminology, may be styled Ultramontanism?

That portion of the Grail romances which we have seen reason to regard as originally non-Christian now claims an examination. And here we must bear in mind the antecedent probability that, as well as the Christian portion, it has been modified by association with alien conceptions and incidents. In no instance, not even in the case of the *Peredur* or *Sir Percyvelle*, can we be sure that features and incidents have not been distorted in order to fit them into a Christian framework. Allowing for this possibility, and considering the Quest versions as a whole, we detect two main themes in the complicated mass of adventure of which they are formed. Certain versions, as we saw, are vengeance stories pure and simple, *Sir Percyvelle*, for instance, and Manessier's conclusion to Crestien's poem; in the *Peredur* the vengeance conception predominates, but we note other and inconsistent elements. Two of the mysterious talismans should, it would seem, be referred to this, the vengeance theme—the bleeding lance (as a rule the weapon with which the hero's injured kinsman has been slain or wounded), and the broken sword (as a rule the weapon with which the injury is to be avenged). In such a story there would seem to be no room for the Grail, the food-producing vessel. But we have more than one version of Perceval's visit to the castle of the Talismans, and, as we saw, his comrade Gawain likewise essays and partly

achieves the venture. As might be expected, the Gawain version is more primitive in tone, less affected by Christian symbolism than that in which Perceval figures. In one form (found in a German poem, *Diu Crone*, by Heinrich v. d. Türlin, which reproduces a lost French original), the inmates of the castle are in a Death in Life trance from which the hero's visit releases them ; in another the partial achievement of the venture causes the heretofore desert land to bloom and blossom afresh. To this theme, the release from enchantment or unspelling quest as we may call it, the mysterious vessel of increase and plenty (the Grail) and the question are, it would seem, referable. The Grail here plays a twofold part ; its inexhaustible food-producing qualities may be the means whereby the life of the lord of the castle is prolonged until the advent of his successor releases him from his vigil, or again, it may be regarded as a fertility talisman from which the land is debarred until the destined hero appears. In either case the result is to put the hero, directly or indirectly, in possession of a fertile land, and the question is the chief means by which the result is attained.

Thus at the back of our present Grail Quest stories lie, as we may conjecture, simple tales of which Perceval and Gawain (in Welsh, Peredur and Gwalchmai), were the heroes. In one the hero avenged the slaying of his father and the

harm done to his uncle (the prototype of *Sir Percyvelle*) ; in another, by means of lance and sword he avenged the wrong done to uncle and cousin (prototype of the *Peredur*) ; another told how, penetrating to a magic castle within a waste and desert realm, he became master of a wonder-working talisman of fertility, and restored plenty to the land ; in another, by aid of the same talisman he either restored a kinsman to health or released him from supernaturally prolonged life, and took his place.

At an early stage of their development these stories, crystallising as they did round the same hero, would have a tendency to influence each other, to become confused. From out the mass of varying, but only slightly varying narratives, a few main forms would emerge, differentiated by greater or less insistence upon the vengeance or the unspelling theme, but betraying, as a rule, the mixture of both. The unspelling conception, as the more definitely mythic of the two, would suffer most change ; the more recondite significance of the old mythic talisman of increase and plenty would tend to disappear ; its material food-producing properties would subsist, and this characteristic, as a matter of fact, is found in every version in which the Grail appears, in Crestien as in Wolfram, in the *Quête* as in *Perceval le Gallois*. The recondite significance of the machinery (the question) by

which the talisman is transferred to the hero's possession might likewise be expected to be lost, and, as a matter of fact, no version offers a satisfactory explanation, nor has any modern interpreter offered one that has won general acceptance. Thanks to the conservatism of story-tellers, it retained its place, but it became unintelligible. What relates to the vengeance conception, on the other hand, was retained in comparatively unchanged form; mythic it might be in origin and essence, yet its simply human character commended it as much to men of the twelfth century as to those of an earlier age. In the *Peredur* and in *Manessier* it has suffered little from contamination, but in *Crestien* and the remainder of the *Conte del Graal* it is subordinated to the unspelling quest, the Grail and question.

In the older Grail quests, though none is wholly free from the Christian element, yet that is, save in the *Parzival*, secondary; the knightly adventurous element predominates. It is otherwise in the later Grail quests (*Quête, Perceval le Gallois*). Here the Christian element dominates. The original sequence of incidents is boldly disregarded or radically modified; the original achiever of the quest, Perceval, is dispossessed by the new favourite in the Arthurian world, Lancelot, represented by his son Galahad. Naturally, the vengeance conception and the incidents by which it is embodied

disappear; naturally, all that relates to the fertility talisman itself (now fully identified with the sacramental vessel) is magnified; naturally, the unintelligible question is almost entirely dropped. But still, though caught up to very heaven, though filled with the essence of divinity, still the Grail retains the material characteristics of an increase and plenty talisman.

In assuming the existence of an original mass of non-Christian narratives from which the existing romances have derived a considerable portion of their subject matter, we rely, though not solely, upon the existence of the *Peredur* and the *Sir Percyvelle*. If these do not represent a stage in the evolution of the Grail Quest romances older than and independent of the *Conte del Graal*, they must needs be derived from that work. How in that case account for the loss of the fertility talisman in the one tale (*Peredur*) and of everything relating to the unspelling quest in the other? Given common sense and absence of prejudice, the question answers itself. But even if these two versions had disappeared the assumption I have made would be legitimate. The Grail Quest romances are, in their extant form, inextricably bound up with the Arthur legend as a whole, and the Arthur legend rests for a very large part upon a basis of Celtic folk and hero tales, representatives of which may still be found in the older

heroic romances of both branches of the Celtic race, the Irish and the Welsh. Of these, the Irish is by far the older and richer, and the oldest portion of the Welsh is so closely connected with Irish legend as to give colour to the hypothesis that it is really due to an Irish population settled in Wales in prehistoric times, and gradually driven out or subjugated by the incoming Welshmen. It is in this old heroic and mythic romance that the closest parallels are found to numerous incidents and sequences of incidents frequently met with in the French Arthurian stories of the twelfth century, and, what is even more significant than parallelism of incident, there is parallelism of tone, of atmosphere, of the modes of conceiving and presenting the story as a whole. In no section of Arthurian romances are the minor parallelisms of incident with the older Celtic legends more frequent than in the Grail Quest stories, or is the parallelism of essential conception more intimate and striking.

Thus, old Celtic romance (Irish or Welsh) is largely concerned with a race of supernatural beings, the gods of the earliest Celtic Pantheon, and the mysterious wonderland in which they dwell. In Ireland they have retained a semi-divine aspect and attributes, they can shift shape at will, they are undying; in Wales they have come down to the level of powerful magicians. This race is in

possession of marvellous talismans, the chief of which is a symbol of fertility and increase in the shape of a cauldron which yields an inexhaustible supply of food to the taste of each partaker. In Irish myth this talisman, the cauldron of the Dagda—"a company used not ever to go away from it unsatisfied,"—is definitely associated with three other talismans, "the sword of Lug the Long-Handed" (the Irish sun-god), "the spear Lug used in battle," and the Lia Fail, or Stone of Destiny (now in the Coronation seat at Westminster Abbey) as the four precious objects which the god race brought with them when they first came to Ireland. A cauldron similar to that of the Dagda (the Irish Zeus) is also part of the gear of Manannan mac Lir (the Irish sea-god), and of Angus, son of the Dagda, the most potent magician of the immortal race. The dwelling places of these mysterious and powerful beings may, like the Grail Castle, be reached by mortals, but only chancewise and if the inmates are willing; like the Grail Castle they suddenly disappear from the ken of the mortal visitor, who finds himself lying on the bare hillside with no trace of the splendours he has witnessed. As in the Grail Castle, the visitor is feasted royally.

In Welsh romance the same magic cauldron appears. In one case it belongs to Bran, son of Llyr (a Welsh representative of the Irish god race), and here its healing and life-restoring powers are

dwelt upon. Such may well have been its attributes in some of those early tales underlying the existing Grail Quest which insisted rather upon the healing of the hero's kinsman than upon the restoration of his land to fertility. Elsewhere it is associated with other talismans of a decidedly mythical character, and is, like the Grail, celebrated alike for its material and its spiritual properties—it is a producer of food, but also of inspiration and ecstasy.

The conception that the welfare of a land may be so bound up with that of its ruler that his evil conduct, or simply his misfortune, may entail famine or desolation, and conversely that his merit or luck may ensure prosperity, is familiar in Irish heroic legend. So also is the conception that the supernatural powers may curse a land with sterility and restore it again to fertility. In Welsh legend magic is the agent, and the Welsh mythic romance, *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, tells of Pryderi, and how his land was subjected by an enemy to an illusion, "where they were wont to see cattle and herds, and dwellings, they saw nothing now, neither house nor beast, nor smoke, nor fire, nor man, nor dwelling, but the houses of the Court empty and desolate, without either man or beast within them." From this illusion, as well as from imprisonment in a magic castle which vanishes as soon as he penetrates

within it, Pryderi and his land are delivered by Manawyddan, son of Llyr (the Welsh counterpart of the Irish sea-god).

In a similar way the conception of a hero urged to the accomplishment of his task by a kinsman lying under enchantment until it is accomplished is also familiar in early Irish romance. It is indeed a conception of world-wide spread, but the Celtic presentation has distinguishing features. A lucky accident has preserved the fragment of an Irish folk story dating back to the tenth century at the latest, in which the bespelled kinsman appears in a hideous guise described in terms which strikingly recall the hideous damsel of the *Conte del Graal* (the hero's cousin, as we learn from the *Peredur*).

It goes without saying that an archaic state of society such as that of mediæval Ireland and Wales laid the utmost stress upon the duty of blood vengeance, and that stories with this theme are common. A famous Irish example is the tale entitled "The Fate of the Children of Turenn," which recounts the tasks imposed by Lug the Long-Handed (the Irish sun-god) upon the slayers of his father. Among these tasks was the winning of a poisonous irresistible spear.

Reference to these early Celtic tales supplies the only hint of an explanation which has yet been suggested of the mysterious question. Their heroes are commonly subject to mysterious spells con-

straining them to do certain actions, or forbidding them from others, under penalty of disaster or death if they infringe the spell. With the Irish story-teller the *geis*, as the spell is called, plays much the same part as Nemesis in Greek myth ; it is the controlling, over-mastering power. It may be conjectured that an injunction of this kind was laid upon the questing hero in one of the tales out of which the romances have grown ; that he was constrained to use certain formalities in the accomplishment of his task, or had imposed upon him certain disabilities, and that this feature, misunderstood as it inevitably would be by twelfth century story-tellers, is reflected in the question incident as we have it.

This series of parallels could be greatly extended if, passing from the salient incidents of the Grail Quest, to which alone I have here been able to call attention, the secondary traits and episodes of the romances were made the subject of comparison. As might be expected, these have been less affected by intruding Christian symbolism, and in consequence they betray their close affinity to the archaic Irish and Welsh tales in a most marked manner. But enough has been instanced, I trust, to demonstrate that the texture, the colouring, the essential conception of the older Grail Quest stories, can be paralleled from early Celtic mythic romance, and, I may add, from no other contemporary

European literature ; if the reference to Celtic romance be discarded, but one alternative remains, namely, that the French story-tellers of the twelfth century made up this fantastic Arthurian realm of eerie glamour out of their own heads.

We may thus feel assured that the talismans themselves, that the quest for them, and the use to which they were put, existed in stories older than and unaffected by Christianity. We note the significant fact that two of the talismans, vessel of plenty and death-dealing spear, are part of the gear of the early Celtic gods, gods who also figure as engaged in laying under sterilising spells the realms of their opponents, whether of their own divine race or belonging to that of men. In so far as these objects could, before their Christian transformation, be charged with mysterious and awe-inspiring potency, in so far as these tales of magic strife could be invested with traditional sanctity, this was the case. It was no simple peasant's tale that came ultimately into the hands of the Christian story-teller, but one elaborated by the bardic class, the jealous guardians, alike in Ireland and in Wales, of the racial mythic and heroic traditions.

We have now briefly surveyed the *corpus* of Grail romances and have found it to consist of Celtic pre-Christian mythic tales (involving ultimately the fates and struggles of gods and demi-

gods), fused with tales which had as their object the glorification of Britain in their account of the illustrious origin and pre-eminent privileges of the Christian Church in these islands. Before this fusion took place the Celtic tales, originally mythic, had been largely heroicised; hero had supplanted demi-god. Yet they retained enough of the primitive intent and content to lend themselves to the creative impulse of the new and higher mythology. The Pagan vessel of increase, plenty and ecstasy was not so far emptied of its pristine significance, but that it could be reshaped as the holiest relic of Christendom, or be identified, by Robert de Borron, with the body of the dead and risen Lord; the Achiever of the Quest was not so oblivious of his primitive mythic status as to be unfitted for the approximation, vaguely suggested by Wolfram and the *Quête*, of his career to that of the Saviour.

But if, thus broadly surveyed, the general development of the stories clustering round the precious talisman may be summed up as the gradual transformation of old Celtic mythic tales into a legend charged with Christian symbolism and mysticism, many stages in this process remain obscure. What suggested the fusion of stories of a hero questing after talismans with those of the evangelisers of Britain? Were these latter, as has been suggested, possessors of the holy vessel

before that fusion took place? If so, what was the form which the conversion legend had assumed, and how was it affected by, and how did it affect the quest story after the twain had been welded into one?

The conversion legend started, it is urged, with Joseph. The forty years' solitary captivity is an essential feature of the Joseph legend. The question naturally arose—how was he kept in life? by a wonderful food-producing vessel of the kind familiar in the folklore of nearly every race, a vessel naturally and progressively identified with the receptacle of Christ's blood, with the dish, and then with the cup of the Last Supper. To guard such a precious relic and to exhibit alike the mysteries of the Trinity and the Sacrament, the three Grail-keepers were imagined: Joseph, Brons, the grandson of Brons; the three tables were instituted: that of the Last Supper with its place left empty by Judas' betrayal; Joseph's table, on which figures the Grail; Arthur's Table Round, with its empty seat to be filled only by the last of the Grail-keepers.

Such a legend would naturally tend to centre round the precious vessel, to exalt it more and more. When a lucky chance suggested the identification of the last Grail-keeper, the filler of the empty seat, the final accomplisher of the dramatic action started centuries before in Palestine, with

the young hero who quested forth in search, he, too, of a precious vessel, and thereby delivered his kinsmen and released their land from enchantment, the two vessels (in their ultimate origin the same) were also fully identified, with the result of strengthening such non-Christian characteristics as still survived in the Christianised vessel of the conversion legend. Thence onwards, the legend developed as each individual writer was attracted by the religious or by the knightly adventurous element, and in accordance with his capacity to shape these different elements so as to set forth his conception.

Ingenious as this hypothesis is, it leaves out of account *why* the conversion legend was associated with personages of the Arthurian cycle. Rather, I think, must the precious vessel be regarded as foreign to the Joseph conversion legend until after this association had taken place. What, then, gave rise to it? I can only point out that Borron's form of the conversion legend betrays not alone Celtic affinities (that inevitably followed once the evangelisers set foot in Celtic Britain), but specific Arthurian affinities in the mention of Avalon as the goal of the Grail host, a mention which Borron himself did not understand, so that even if the Arthurian machinery of the *Merlin*—the establishment of the Round Table in imitation of that of the Grail table—be ascribed to Borron,

yet the fusion of conversion and Arthur legends must have begun before his time. Avalon is the Welsh form of the old Celtic Elysium, of which vivid and detailed descriptions have survived in Irish literature; an Elysium closely allied to the dwelling-places of the Celtic god-race, the owners of the inexhaustible food cauldron of the Dagda, of the Spear and Sword of Lug, the race represented in Wales by the Children of Llyr and Don. Second only in importance to Joseph in Borron's poem are his kinsmen, Brons and Alain, who bear distinctively Celtic names. Brons recalls the Welsh Bran, son of Llyr, possessor, in the Welsh tale of Branwen, of a cauldron of healing and rejuvenation, himself transported after his death on earth to an Elysium, where he continued a mystic life; when slain in battle, his comrades, at his bidding, cut off his head, and with it retire to Gwales in Penvro, where they pass fourscore years, "unconscious of having spent a time more joyous and mirthful . . . it was not more irksome to them having the head with them than if Blessed Bran had been with them himself." At the end of the fourscore years infringing an injunction which Bran had laid upon them, and becoming aware of the flight of time and of all their past woe, they bury their lord's head near London, and so long as it remained concealed the isle of Britain was free from invasion. At a date which is uncertain, but of which, at least,

no definite trace exists prior to the late thirteenth century, Bran was made the hero in Wales of a conversion legend, which may embody old tradition but may, on the other hand, be a reflex of the Grail romances, though, if so, it is the only trace in Welsh of any knowledge of Borron's version. In support of its embodying old tradition is the fact that, as just cited, in the tale of Branwen, the redaction of which goes back to the eleventh century, Bran has the epithet Blessed. This originally Pagan epithet, doubtless applied to him as possessor of the rejuvenation cauldron, may have been the starting-point of a legend ascribing to him a share in the introduction of Christianity into Britain.

Taking all these indications into existence, it seems most likely that Borron, or rather the sources he followed, became acquainted with a *Bran* conversion legend, and fused it with the better-known *Joseph* one. In this way Bran's precious vessel would become associated with Joseph. True we only know of it from the Welsh tale of Branwen as a rejuvenation and healing talisman, but this conception is closely allied to that of a talisman of increase and plenty, and, as a matter of fact, it is found also in the Grail romances, though less insisted upon than the other. Moreover, we only know of one aspect of Bran's cauldron from our Welsh tale, because only one

form of its power is there brought into play; the merest fragment of Welsh mythic romance has come down to us, and it is folly to argue as if what we do not find in that fragment cannot have existed.

The fusion of the two conversion legends would undoubtedly be facilitated by the fact of the localisation of the Joseph legend at Glastonbury. This ancient seat of British Christianity was at some unknown date identified with Avalon; the texts which have preserved this identification are comparatively late, and the identification has been ascribed to the influence of the romances. Undoubtedly the story as we have it bears traces of the efforts made during Henry the Second's reign to utilise the Celtic legends for political purposes. But the first germ of the conception that a venerable sanctuary of the Christian faith in Britain had succeeded, as it were, to the attributes of the wonderland of the Celtic gods must be far older than Henry's reign—older, indeed, than the twelfth century.

The fusion of a Brons and a Joseph conversion legend (a fusion, be it noted, which could take place in Britain and in Britain alone) would not only permit the introduction of the precious vessel into the latter, it would almost inevitably bring it into contact with the Arthur cycle. The latter is largely made up of heroicised versions of themes

and incidents which had figured at an earlier date in mythic romance, and it had drawn many of the personages of the older mythic world within its grasp. In this way the connection between the hero legend of Arthur, defender of Britain against heathen invaders, and the religious legend of the evangelisers of Britain would be established naturally, and so as to allow of, nay, to invite, further development.

Assuming, then, that prior to Crestien's time, the two portions of the legend had been welded into a more or less compact whole, and that the Quest talismans had thereby acquired Christian attributes and properties, the question arises how far the process of fusion had been carried, and in what way it was affected by Crestien's work. Did the French poet find in his source any such coherent account of the early history of the Grail and lance as is yielded either by Robert de Borron, or by the rival version of the *Grand St. Graal-Quête*? If Crestien's continuators got their information from his source, that source must likewise have been the fountain-head of the *Grand St. Graal-Quête*. Crestien would in that case seem to have deliberately left in abeyance the definite religious element of his source, and to have devoted himself to the elaboration of the knightly adventurous portion. For, even if at his hero's second visit to the Grail Castle he had given the information we

now find in his continuators, the religious aspect of his work would still be pale and slight in comparison with the adventurous. But whether the continuators of Crestien did resort to the latter's source is extremely doubtful in view of the marked divergence in the conduct of the story between both Manessier and Gerbert, and the poet whose work they were completing. Nor can the question be decided without reference to Wolfram's source, the lost French poem of Guiot. Two hypotheses respecting this are possible. It may have been, as is now more commonly assumed, composed within a few years after Crestien's death with a view to giving a complete version of the story he had left incomplete. If so, and if Crestien's source had contained either form of the Early History in as an advanced stage of development as in Robert de Borron, or to *Grand St. Graal*, would, or could Guiot have discarded it? He could have made it subservient to the greater glory of the Angevin princes as easily as the version which he offers; he could have adapted it as readily to the moral and spiritual conceptions which animate his work. If, on the other hand, Guiot's poem is older than that of Crestien, it is probably nearer to the common source of both in its lesser insistence upon the Christian machinery derived from the Conversion legend, although, thanks to the poet's personality, it is animated

by a far deeper and more spiritual Christian feeling.

Thus, although both Crestien's and Guiot's accounts of the Grail seem to presuppose its previous identification not only with the receptacle of Christ's blood, but also with the sacramental cup (as evidenced in Guiot's case by the fact that the power of the Grail is renewed by a Host), it is unlikely that such a full and coherent form of the Early History as we find in the later romances was accessible to them. It may rather be conjectured that the stress they laid upon the knightly adventurous element in the story led other writers to elaborate the Early History by way of accentuating the religious element.

The real achievement of Crestien and Guiot, the decisive influence they exerted upon the evolution of the cycle, lay in their conception and presentation of the Quest. Substantially the non-Christian framework and texture, with all their fascinating charm and variety, are retained, but the story is lifted on to a loftier moral and intellectual plane, and thereby enabled to hold its own against the competition of the purely Christian portion of the legend. This intellectualising, spiritualising process is far more developed in Guiot than in Crestien, and it is a matter for profound regret that, as ingeniously surmised by Dr. Wechsler, the Angevin (*i.e.* English) tendencies of Guiot's poem brought it into disfavour

in France as soon as the French royal house had got the better of its formidable rivals. Had it been otherwise, had Henry II. been succeeded by a son wise and able as himself, and England thereby secured the hegemony of the French-speaking world, Guiot, instead of Crestien, might have yielded the standard, the dominant version of the Quest. As it is, we must at least be thankful that his work fell into the hands of a man as well fitted as was Wolfram to appreciate its moral and spiritual aims.

We can measure the service rendered by these two great poets to the story of the Grail Quest by comparing their work with the aimless and rambling jumble of disconnected adventures found in the continuations of Crestien.

The after development of the cycle, though presenting numberless problems of detail, is yet fairly clear in its main outline. Crestien and Guiot made the Grail Quest story fashionable as much by their skill in relating the marvellous feats and ventures of the hero as by the moral and spiritual aim of their work. One set of following writers simply worked such veins of the knightly adventurous mine as have been left unexploited by the two great poets; others elaborated the distinctively Christian portion, the Early History; others, again, fused the two, more or less maladroitly. But the normal development of the cycle was profoundly modified

by influences which were modifying the entire body of Arthurian romance. To understand the later versions of the Quest we must realise the nature of these influences.

In the earliest stages of the Arthurian cycle the pre-eminent hero is Gawain, who is also second only to Perceval as hero of the Quest story. Perceval's rank in the latter gave him a position in the Arthurian world, generally, inferior only to that of Gawain. At a later stage both were superseded by Lancelot, who became the acknowledged mirror and exemplar of chivalry. To attain this position Gawain had to be degraded, and a sure test of the age of any given Arthurian text is yielded by the view it presents of Gawain's character. Lancelot owed his pre-eminence to the fact that he became, as the Queen's lover, the exemplar of the ideal of courtly love. But this very ideal provoked what may be called a Puritan reaction among a certain section of romance-writers, who eagerly sought out whatever might yield matter for an opposing ideal of ascetic life. The Perceval Quest was thus rewritten by the author of *Perceval le Gallois* in a spirit of militant asceticism; the hero's virginity is insisted upon aggressively. But the progress of Lancelot towards the headship, after Arthur, of the Arthurian world kept pace with the increasing favour shown towards the Grail Quest as the most marvellous "branch"

of the whole Arthurian cycle. A time must naturally come when Arthur's mightiest hero could no longer be kept out of the chief venture of Arthur's Court. Yet when that time came the Puritan reaction had fixed a deep chasm between the two sets of tendency exhibited in the cycle—the knightly amorous and the spiritual ascetic. How could Lancelot, the Queen's lover, be permitted even to view, much less to become possessed of, the holy vessel into which by this time the full potency of sacramental mysticism had been poured ? Yet how could he, pattern of knighthood, be excluded from its blessings ? The dilemma was solved, the chasm was bridged by the creation of Lancelot's son Galahad, in whom was exemplified in a yet more uncompromising, yet more inhuman spirit the ideal of militant asceticism imperfectly set forth by the author of *Perceval le Gallois*. In this way arose and took shape the Galahad Quest of the *Grand St. Graal-Quête*. It is possible that the writers of these romances may have embodied some earlier features, possible that they may have built up their hero round the personality of some forgotten hero of the Arthurian cycle; but in his very essence, as in the major part of his adventures, Galahad is emphatically the latest comer in the world of Arthurian romance.

Only a word need be said about *Sir Percyvelle*

and the *Peredur*. The former reproduced, with hardly a trace of the prodigious development which had taken place, one of the pre-Christian component stories of the Grail Quest; the second, the Welsh tale, reproduced another pre-Christian component form accurately, as regards the essence of the story, but with a considerable amount of ornamental detail taken from Crestien and other French sources. As a rule, this extraneous matter remains simple ornament, but at times it obscures and distorts the march of the story.

Such, all too briefly sketched, has been the development of the Grail cycle from the time when legends relating the evangelisation of Britain were brought into contact with heroised versions, belonging to the Arthur cycle, of older mythic tales. The composite legend thus formed, lived and flourished because it was composite, because it drew sustenance and spirit from the two worlds the fusion of which constitutes Modern Europe, the world of Christian classic culture, and the older barbaric world which that culture was to transform, but by which it was also to be itself transformed. The most diverse types of spiritual and artistic intelligence could thus find sustenance for their imaginings. The magic talisman of the Celtic gods, the Holiest Relic of Christian faith, gave to each "the food he

most desired." Its bounty is not exhausted though countless generations have fed from it. Within the last fifty years this marvellous legend has proved as fertile in the mind of genius, as it was eight hundred years ago, to set forth and typify the longings and ideals of humanity.



NOTES

THE object of the present Series of Popular Studies is as much to assist those who are anxious to pursue a special line of study as to give an accurate summary of any particular subject to those who do not wish for more than a general knowledge of it. In the present instance the second intention is almost impossible to realise in view of the enormous mass and great complexity of the subject-matter. All the more, therefore, do I trust that I may be able to induce many of my readers to take up the study of the Grail cycle. There is only one way of setting about this, and that is to read the romances themselves. Luckily, several of the most important are easily accessible to the English reader. The PEREDUR, the most archaic form of the Quest story, may be read in my edition of the *Mabinogion*; Wolfram's PARZIVAL, the finest example of the Quest story as transformed by Christian influence, in Miss Weston's translation (2 vols. 10s. 6d.) ; the PERCEVAL LE GALLOIS, the transitional bridge between the knightly hero of Crestien-Guiot and the ascetic hero of the later legend, in Dr. Evans' exquisite translation (*The High History of the Holy Grail*, 2 vols. 14s.) ; and the QUÊTE DU ST. GRAAL, the final outcome of Puritan asceticism, in Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* (best read in Dr. Sommer's faithful reprint of Caxton's text, 2 vols. 7s. 6d., in which it occupies Books 13-18). When these four versions have been mastered, the main

lines of development will be clear, and attention can be given to the remaining works of the cycle. Of these, the GRAND ST. GRAAL and the DIDOT PERCEVAL are accessible in Hucher's *Le Saint-Graal ou le Joseph d'Arimathie*, 3 vols., 1875-78 (£1 10s.). A fifteenth-century metrical English adaptation of the GRAND ST. GRAAL has likewise been edited by Dr. Furnivall : *Seynt Graal ; or, the Sank Ryal*, 2 vols., 1861-63 (printed for the Roxburghe Club), but this is only accessible to frequenters of large libraries ; moreover, the reader who has a fair knowledge of modern French will, after a few days' work, find the thirteenth-century prose of the French original easier to understand than the fifteenth-century verse of the English adaptation. Borron's poem is printed in Furnivall's *Seynt Graal*.

SIR PERCYVELLE is accessible in Halliwell's edition : *The Thornton Romances*, 1884, printed for the Camden Society. Unfortunately the chief work of the cycle, the CONTE DEL GRAAL, is practically inaccessible, only 100 copies having been printed of the only edition, that of M. Potvin, 6 vols., Mons, 1866-71. Professor Baist is engaged upon a new edition. Readers who can consult one of the few copies extant in England, and who have a fair knowledge of modern French, will not find Crestien very difficult, less so than is Chaucer to the average well-educated Englishman.

As regards the literature of the subject, there are only two works to which the reader can be referred for full and accurate summaries of the romances : Birch-Hirschfeld, *Die Sage vom Gral*, 1877, and my own *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail*, 1888. This latter, the only work accessible to readers unacquainted with German, is now out of print. The only other work dealing with the cycle as a whole, Prof. R. Heinzel's *Die französischen Gralromane*, a monument of erudition and ingenuity, is useless to all but advanced students, the "senior wranglers" of the study. Dr. E. Wechssler has done

excellent work in determining the relation to each other of the existing prose romances, and in tracing their development (*Die verschiedenen Redaktionen der Graal-Lancelot Cyklus*, 1895), and his *Sage v. heil. Gral.*, 1898, which contains a useful bibliography, and many acute and valuable suggestions might be recommended if it did not present the author's hypothetical view of the development of the legend (a view entirely untenable in parts) in such a way as to lead the unknowing reader to imagine that it set forth the evidence of the texts.

Other works will be mentioned as occasion offers.

CRESTIEN'S DATE. (Page 6.)

This has been best fixed by Wechssler, *Sage v. h. G.*, par. 63.

WOLFRAM'S PARZIVAL. (Page 11.)

The most perplexing and obscure problems of the Grail literature are connected with this poem. In addition to Miss Weston's translation, the following should be consulted, in addition to the works cited, *Studies*, p. 261: Hagen, *Parzival-Studien*, 1892; Golther, *Lohengrin* (Rom. *Forschungen*, V. 1890); Lichtenstein, *Zur Parzivalfrage* (Paul u. Braune, Beitr. 1897); Hertz' admirable modern German adaptation of Wolfram's *Parzival*, 1898.

THE CONTINUATORS OF CRESTIEN. (Page 9.)

The following may be consulted: H. Waitz, *Die Fortsetzungen v. Crestien's P. le Gallois*, 1890.

The statements on the subject in my *Studies* must be supplemented and corrected from this work.

DATE OF GRAND ST. GRAAL. (Page 27.)

Up to 1898, the date of 1204, assumed to be that in which Helinandus finished his Chronicle, was accepted as

a terminus ad quem for the GRAND ST. GRAAL, or for its source. Dr. Evans, *High History*, ii. p. 293, has shown that Helinandus wrote about 1220.

PERCEVAL LE GALLOIS. (Page 34.)

This has been recently studied by Dr. Nitze, *The old French Grail Romance of Perlesvaus*. Baltimore, 1902.

THE JOSEPH LEGEND. (Page 41.)

The chief discussion of the Glastonbury legend is that of Prof. G. Baist, *Zeitschrift für Rom. Philologie*, xix.

Prof. Wölcker, *Das Evangelium Nicodemi in der abendländischen Literatur*, 1872, has shown the early knowledge of this apocryphal work in England.

GLASTONBURY AND AVALON. (Page 42.)]

Cf. M. Ferd Lot : *Glastonbury et Avalon*, in *Romania*, vol. xxvii.

THE GRAIL KNIGHTS AND THE TEMPLARS. (Page 48.)

The special modification of the Grail Quest with a view of connecting it more closely with the Temple knighthood found in Guiot-Wolfram is undoubtedly bound up with a number of Oriental traits and features only met with in the Parzival. These lend colour to the hypothesis that Guiot had himself been in the East, and become acquainted with many Eastern legends, and also that he was in some way attached to the Temple order.

These Oriental traits in the Parzival have misled certain scholars into imagining an Eastern origin for the Grail legend. The last statement of this view is Prof. A. Wesselovsky's : *Archiv f. Slav. Philologie*, 1901.

Cf. Dr. P. Hagen's valuable *Der Gral*, 1900.

CELTIC ELEMENTS IN THE GRAIL LEGEND.
(Pages 55-59.)

In my *Studies* I chiefly dwelt upon the Irish analogies and parallels. Prof. Rhys in his *Arthurian Legend*, 1891, brought into prominence the Welsh parallels, notably the enchantment of Pryderi's land with the wasting of the realm of the Fisher King (Perceval's uncle).

THE BESPELLED AND AIDING KINSMAN. (Page 58.)

This instance, from *Cormac's Glossary*, an Irish compilation of the 10th-11th centuries, is cited and discussed by me, *Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition*, 1890, vol. ii., p. 467.

○ THE QUESTION. (Page 58.)

My explanation of this as due to misunderstanding of an original *geis* (pronounced *gess*) is strengthened by the kinship between the Lohengrin (Swan Knight) and Grail story. For in Lohengrin the supernatural hero is under a *geis* not to reveal his name, and the infringement of this tabu ensures his withdrawal to his own land. Now the oldest known instance of the theme of a supernatural wife, or husband, who imposes injunctions the infringement of which is fatal, is found in Ireland, in the well-known story entitled *Noinden Ulad* (the Feebleness of the Ulstermen).

Cf. Miss Hull's *Cuchullin Saga*, p. 96.

(Pages 62, 63.)

The two paragraphs are a summary of Dr. Wechssler's argument, *Sage v. heil. Gral*, pp. 12-18. I agree with the argument, save when I express dissent from it.

GUIOT AND CRESTIEN. (Page 68.)

Miss Weston is the chief advocate of Guiot's priority. I think she is right.

LANCELOT. (Pages 71, 72.)

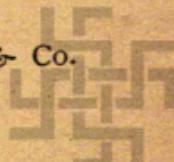
Cf. Miss Weston's *Legend of Sir Lancelot du Lac*, 1901,
on which this paragraph is based.

(Page 74.)

I allude of course, to Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*.



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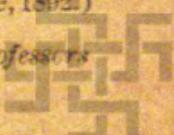
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